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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000956

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DEPT OF LABOR FOR ILAB - MMITTELHAUSER; BSASSER STATE FOR G/TIP,
EAP/MLS, DRL/IL, PRM/PRP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KWMN](#) [KCRM](#) [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAI POLICE BUST HUMAN TRAFFICKING RING; 57 WOMEN AND GIRLS
RELEASED

¶11. (U) Summary. Thai Immigration Police have detained a ring of 13 traffickers and released 57 brothel workers in multiple raids that took place from January 19-31 in southern and central Thailand. Of the 57 workers, at least 25 have described themselves as victims forced into prostitution. Eight victims were around 15 years of age. The raids were all linked to the escape of a Cambodian woman who was found last November near the Malaysian border after fleeing from a brothel. The woman directed police to the brothel, and subsequent surveillance and monitoring of bank accounts led to a much broader investigation, which revealed a network extending to the Cambodian border. The anti-money laundering law will be applied to seize the ring's sizeable assets. The financier of the ring, who is still at large, is reportedly a major land owner. Warrants are out for the arrest of five other Thai and Cambodian traffickers from the same gang. End Summary.

¶12. (U) In an interview with Thai immigration police in Bangkok, Emboffs learned the details of a series of raids that exposed a large trafficking ring and released 57 prostitutes from several brothels. The trafficking ring was exposed when one of its victims escaped from a brothel (masquerading as a karaoke bar) in Padang Besar, Songkhla province, near the Malaysian border. The Cambodian woman was found injured by cigarette burns on November 21, 2005. She turned to a Thai NGO, the Center for the Protection of Children's Rights (CPCR), which contacted the Ministry of Social Development. Immigration police then raided the brothel on January 19, 2006, releasing six more prostitutes and arresting four traffickers.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

¶13. (U) While detained, one of the four traffickers attested that the brothel's procurer was a Cambodian man, Sompon, whose payments were transferred to his stepfather's account and managed by his mother. Sompon allegedly brought women and girls to a two-story wooden house in Lopburi, for the price of 6,000 baht (USD 150) per head. Sompon also is alleged to have provided transport along trafficking routes from Aranyaprathet (on the border with Cambodia) to points south on the way to Hat Yai, a possible transit point to Malaysia. According to police, money was transferred through Siam Commercial Bank to Samutprakan, a province near Bangkok, into the account of his Thai stepfather, Song Charam. Sompon's mother, also Cambodian, is believed by police to have been the ring's financial manager. Money then flowed to three bank accounts belonging to two Thai men and one Thai woman, living on the Cambodian border, who have not yet been apprehended. According to Thai police, the amount was in "hundreds of thousands of baht." (1 USD = 40 baht)

FIVE MORE RAIDS FIND 8 TRAFFICKERS AND 50 WOMEN AND GIRLS

¶14. (U) After discovering the brothel in Padang Besar, immigration police carried out five more raids in central Thailand. Three raids in Lopburi on January 25 turned up no victims, apparently due to a leak, but one trafficker was arrested. All of these houses had small rooms with outside locks, and there was clear evidence of the prostitution trade, including 100,000 baht (USD 25,000) in cash. On the same day in Saraburi, one trafficker was arrested and three women were released from a local brothel. On January 31, a large raid occurred in Cha Choengsao, in which seven traffickers were arrested and 47 prostitutes released. Of these 47 prostitutes, 25 are identified as trafficking victims: 17 attested that they were captured and forced into prostitution, and another eight of the workers were about 15 years old. Their ethnicities are a mixture of Cambodian, Lao, Burmese, and Shan (from Thai hilltribe villages).

¶15. (U) Song Charam, alleged to be a major financier of the ring, is still at-large, as are five of his Thai and Cambodian associates. The anti-money laundering law will be applied to seize their sizable assets, including a number of forfeited houses, businesses, vehicles and land deeds. These assets will be placed in a criminal assets fund. There are no provisions in Thai law to redistribute these assets to the victims. However, civil lawsuits by the victims against their traffickers might be pursued.

16. (U) Comment. This latest TIP bust is more evidence that traffickers in Thailand are redirecting their efforts towards Hat Yai in Songkhla province, which is alleged by the RTG and international NGOs to be a growing transit point for destinations elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The head of this investigation, Police Colonel Kraiboon Suadsong - Commander of Bangkok Immigration Police Division 1, reports to Deputy Police Commissioner Gen. Amnouay Phetsiri and has been responsible for several of the police's successful anti-TIP investigations in recent years. End Comment.